Children’s Dental Disease - Fact Sheet

Too many children suffer from dental disease

- Dental disease is the single most common chronic childhood disease — five times more common than asthma and seven times more common than hay fever.¹

- Dental disease is so widespread and the health effects so significant that the U.S. Surgeon General has classified dental disease as a silent epidemic.² ³

- The most recent national survey shows that the rate of dental disease among children is increasing. Among children age two to five years, dental disease increased from 24 to 28 percent between 1988-1994 and 1999-2004.³ ³

- While the rate of dental decay among young children in Washington state is decreasing, it’s still too high.
  - 40% of low-income preschoolers have decay.
  - 58% of 3rd graders have decay. ⁴

Dental disease prevention needs to begin at an early age

- Less than 43% of children from birth through age 5 enrolled in Washington’s Medical Assistance program visited a dentist in 2009.⁵

- Statewide, it is estimated that less than one percent of children under age three receive dental disease prevention services during well child visits.⁶ ⁶ ⁶ On average, children visit a physician 8 times for well-child checkups before age three.

The consequences and costs of dental disease are significant

- Poor oral health of children has been related to poor performance in school, poor social relationships and less success in later life. If children are in pain, it distracts them from concentrating on schoolwork. Low- and moderate-income children miss a disproportionate amount of school due to dental disease.⁶

- Children with severe dental decay often need to be treated in a hospital operating room, costing about $5,000 to $7,000 per child.⁹

- In 2009, the state Medicaid program spent more than $55 million treating children for dental disease.⁹

- Poor oral health has been linked to diabetes, heart disease and other long-term health problems.¹⁰
Sources:


ii Ibid.


v Washington State Medical Assistance Administration, Department of Social and Health Services, *Dental Services Utilization Report, Fiscal Year 2009*.


vii Washington State Medical Assistance Administration, Department of Social and Health Services, *Fluoride varnish applications by primary care providers, fiscal year 2005*.


ix Joel Berg, Director of Dentistry, Children’s Hospital and Regional Medical Center, personal communication, June 2008.


xi U.S. DHHS *Oral Health in America*. 
